

A SERMON:

PREACHED

IN THE CHAPEL OF TRINITY COLLEGE,

TORONTO,

ON SUNDAY, JUNE 27, 1852.

PUBLISHED AT THE REQUEST OF THE STUDENTS.

BY

GEORGE WHITAKER, M. A.,

PROVOST OF TRINITY COLLEGE.

"The ministerial office consecrates us to whatever concerns the reality,
or the appearance, of religion."

MASSILLON.

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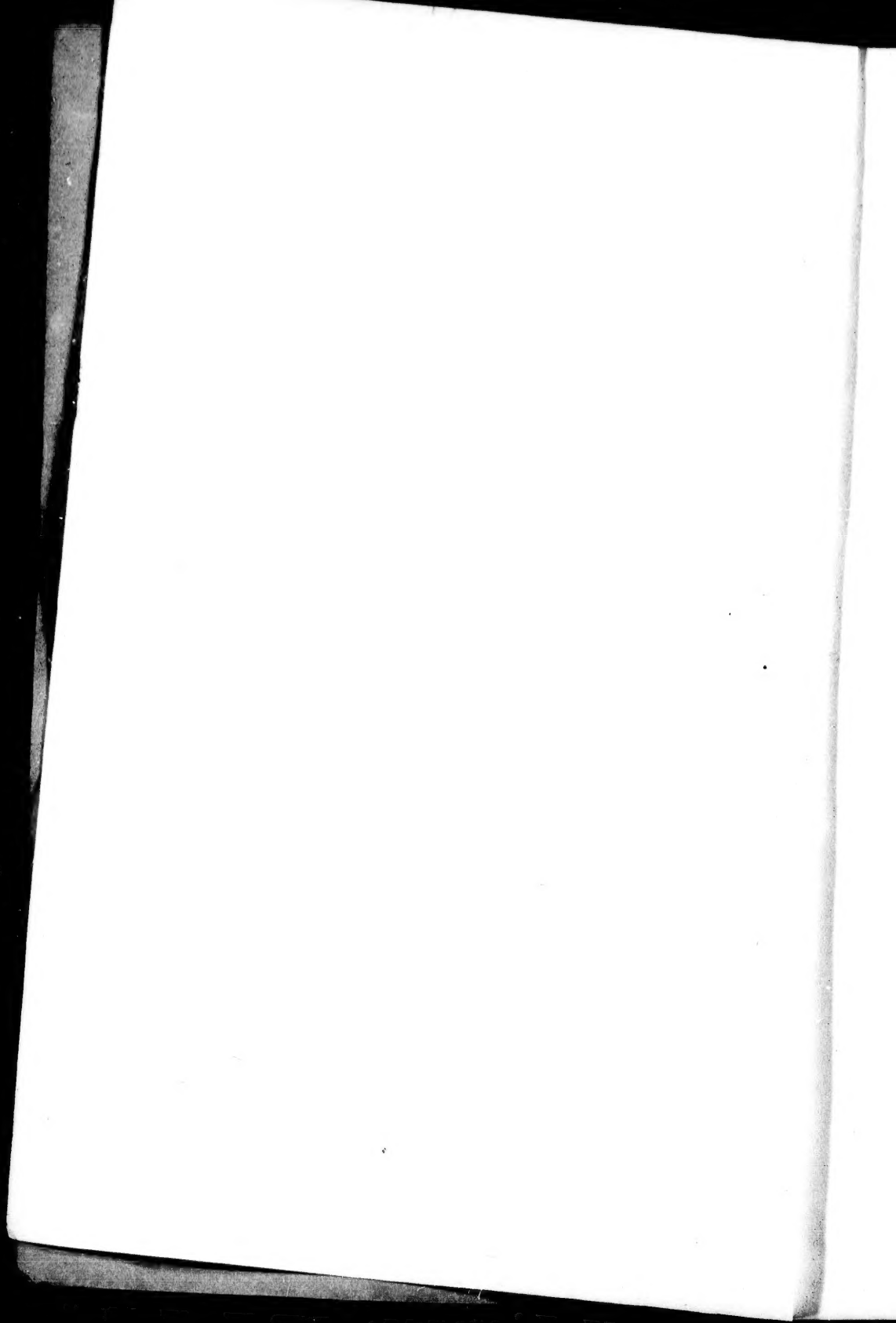
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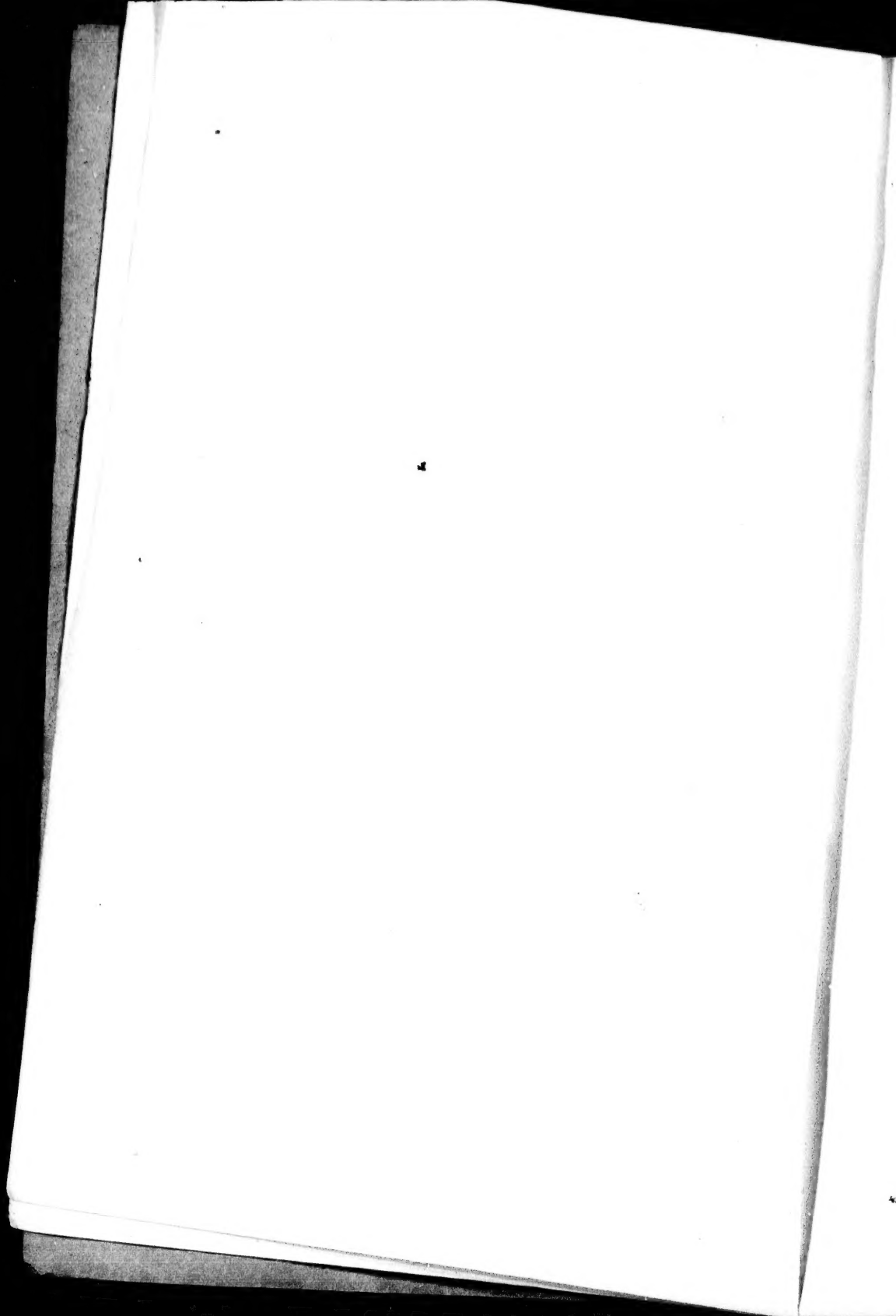
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TO
THE RIGHT REVEREND FATHER IN GOD,
JOHN,
LORD BISHOP OF TORONTO,
TO WHOM
TRINITY COLLEGE OWES ITS FOUNDATION,
THIS SERMON,
PREACHED IN THE COLLEGE CHAPEL
AT THE CLOSE OF THE FIRST ACADEMICAL YEAR,
IS MOST RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED, BY
HIS LORDSHIP'S
OBLIGED AND FAITHFUL SERVANT,
THE AUTHOR.



I. SAMUEL, II. 30.

Them that honour me, I will honour ; and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed.

THE last Sunday in our academical year, reminding us, as it does, that the term of residence is, in the instance of some of your number, about to expire, and that they are leaving us for the purpose of taking upon themselves the duties and responsibilities of the sacred ministry, invites me to offer some remarks respecting the important vocation which lies before them, and the purposes and resolutions by which they should be inspired in looking forward to it. Nor is a sufficient reason for abstaining from speaking on this subject supplied by the fact that comparatively few among you are in near expectation of entering on the duties of the pastoral office. The prospect, though somewhat more remote in the case of others, is still by no means a distant one ; nor can it be too early for any one before whom it lies to begin to look with thoughtful eye upon the path he expects to tread—to count the cost of the long warfare in which he purposes to engage.

It is not necessary, in choosing this subject of discourse, that I should neglect the teaching which our Church provides for the day ;* for its lessons contain an awful warning, as to all who profess and call

* The third Sunday after Trinity.

themselves God's servants, so especially to those who are, or who look to become, in a more peculiar sense, His ministers. This warning, taken in connection with others contained in the Old Testament history, might suffice to guard us against every deadly error of which we can be guilty by the assumption or by the abuse of sacred functions. We learn, in the instance of Korah and his company, that God will not pardon those who, without an external call, presumptuously intrude themselves into His service. We learn again that, where this call has been received, men may yet grievously offend God, and provoke Him to visit them with severest punishment; either by the arrogance or levity which, as in the case of Nadab and Abihu, induces them to neglect the sacred order prescribed in their ministrations; or, again, by a moral turpitude which, as in the instance of Hophni and Phinehas, brings disgrace upon religion, and causes men to "abhor the offering of the Lord." Hence we may learn that holy offices are not only not to be usurped, but also that they are not to be profaned; and again, that they are liable to profanation of very different kinds—to an abuse proceeding from spiritual pride, which makes God's holy things, of which we should be ministers, ministers to our own vanity—which perverts the influence attached to the station which He has assigned us in his Church to the promotion of corrupt worship or of false doctrine; or again, to an abuse proceeding from a

worldly and unchastened spirit, which defiles the holiest of all times, and places, and duties by its corrupt presence, and makes men loathe and despise, for its sake, the very name of Christianity.

In discoursing at large, with a reference to the warnings presented by sacred history, on the preparation necessary for the discharge of the Christian ministry, it would be natural to insist on those two points which are brought prominently forward in our service for the ordering of deacons, the outward and the inward call to the office. I would, however, on the present occasion, confine myself to the admonition which the lessons for the day address to us, and consequently say nothing respecting the necessity of an outward call to God's service in the ministry of His Church; not, by any means, because I regard this as an unimportant subject, nor because it would not, in some cases, require to be insisted on rather than the other grand qualification for the ministerial office; but because, in all probability, the circumstances of your birth and education have conduced to satisfy your minds and to settle your convictions on this point, and also because it is a subject which falls within the range of our studies here, and may be more fully and satisfactorily treated of in the course of those studies than in a sermon.

Assuming, then, that you will be prepared to give the prescribed reply to the enquiry of the Bishop, "Do you think that you are truly called, according to the

will of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the due order of this Realm, to the Ministry of the Church?" let me invite your attention exclusively to the solemn enquiry which precedes it, "Do you trust that you are inwardly moved by the Holy Ghost to take upon you this office and ministration, to serve God for the promoting of His glory and the edifying of His people?"

This enquiry is made of the candidate for Deacon's orders, but it is never repeated, unlike the second enquiry, which, *mutatis mutandis*, is addressed again to the candidate for the Priesthood. And why is this? The question respecting the external call is probably repeated, partly on account of the distinction between the Diaconate and the Priesthood, and the possibility that a man's mind may be satisfied respecting the former, though it be not so respecting the latter; and partly because it is a question relating to a conviction founded on historical evidence, respecting which a renewed assurance may be called for and given with little risk of misconception or offence. But the enquiry respecting the inward call would appear to be regarded as being of too solemn a nature to be made again; the Church would seem to bear in mind the avowal which has once passed the lips of her minister, and to be unwilling to blunt his perception of the solemnity of that confession by requiring him to reiterate it: if it were once sincerely made, she needs no further assurance; if it were thoughtlessly or insincerely made, the judgment must be left to God;

she will not force him whose lips have once spoken thus, to repeat the awful words by which he must be so signally justified or condemned. Surely, then, we may learn a grave lesson of wisdom from the fact that the words are to be spoken but once; that the Church asks no confirmation—contemplates no revocation—of the assurance when it has once been given, but receives it from us as a life-long pledge of our devotion to the service of Almighty God, and, by so doing, warns us to weigh it well beforehand—to ponder well its deep meaning—not to “be rash with our mouth, nor let our heart be hasty to utter before God” a thing so sacred as this.

But again, we may observe the different terms in which the two interrogatories respecting the outward and the inward call are expressed: “Do you *think*?” in the one case, “Do you *trust*?” in the other. For respecting the outward call a judgment is formed on historical evidence, but respecting the inward call the case is widely different—we have not here to deal with any objective truth—we have to search our own hearts, to examine ourselves. Here, then, we can but *trust*, and at best attain only to a humble and modest confidence, on the ground of which *alone* none but a vain enthusiast would venture on the discharge of any sacred function, yet *without* which the external call will give us but an authority which can profit us nothing as individuals, placing us indeed amongst those who are commissioned to do wonderful

works in the name of Christ, yet leaving us with those to whom he will say at the last, "I never knew you."

Let us, however, examine more nearly what is meant by the enquiry, "Do you trust?" and by the reply, "I trust so." We may well be thankful that the Church holds and prescribes language so chastened and discreet as this is—that she does not require of us, in so sacred an instance, to express any presumptuous persuasion of Divine guidance or approval. We may gratefully confess that she is herein true to the meekness and gentleness of Christ; that her voice does but echo the language of the Chief Shepherd; that we seem to hear in it His tones of mingled warning and encouragement, when He bade man follow Him, or required of the penitent apostle an avowal of his love. We may well be thankful that the words of our Service bear no wider interpretation than they do, but we must be careful also that we do not unduly narrow their meaning. For, what is it to *trust*? We use the word vaguely in common conversation, sometimes implying by *trust* nothing more than an earnest hope, where we have no *data* on which to ground any reasonable expectation or belief: and again, we say that we trust, when our confidence rests on some general law of God's providence, or on some attribute of God revealed in holy scripture. But here our trust, except it be vain, must have special and particular grounds on which

to rest. Every Christian child is taught to say that he *trusts* "that God will, of His mercy and goodness," hear and accept his prayers; for this is a trust which all Christians may alike entertain, a trust grounded on God's general promises to His Church. But the trust that the Holy Ghost is moving us to take upon us the office of the Christian ministry, is something widely different from this; it is a trust that God is separating us from among others for a peculiar service—that he is designing us for a special work—and such a trust as this must surely have grounds of its own.

And here it is but too easy to deceive ourselves—we may but too readily take some such view of the matter as follows: A man may say to himself before ordination, "I should dread to take on me the office of the ministry without God's favor and approval; I desire to have His blessing in the discharge of its duties; I earnestly hope that I am under the guidance of His spirit; God knows that I have this earnest hope, and so I trust to be accepted with Him in the step I am about to take." Now, if we are content thus to satisfy ourselves, we are putting too low a sense on the language of our Ordination service. There are indeed no grounds on which we can ordinarily be *assured* of being moved by God's Spirit, but there are grounds on which we may *trust* that we are moved by Him; and this trust is something entirely distinct from any hope or desire, felt at the

time, that we may be guided and directed by God. On what, then, must this trust be grounded, if it is not to disappoint us ?

It must be grounded, first, on the fact that the providence of God has placed the external call within our reach, and has given us opportunities of fitting ourselves for the discharge of the duties of the ministry, as well as a disposition to avail ourselves of them. The God whose Spirit is to move us, is the "God whose never-failing providence ordereth all things both in heaven and earth," and we must learn to read in the appointments of His providence the indications of His will ; not, however, that difficulties in our way are generally to be regarded as prohibitions ; yet difficulties may arise, and impediments may present themselves, which cannot be overcome but by the violation of some moral rule—the neglect of some obvious duty ; and in all such cases we should be ready to own the finger of God. Nor, again, if the way be plain and easy, may we certainly conclude, on that ground alone, that it is God's will that we should tread it. Though external impediments be removed, hinderances may remain within us—hinderances yet more serious in their character than any which can exist without. And here we are brought to consider directly the most important ground of the trust of which I have been speaking. It is something in our past history which must furnish the principal ground of this trust. Let us ask ourselves, "Whom

will God's spirit move to take upon him the office of a Christian minister?" Is it possible that He should move one who, up to that time, has been grieving Him by cherished sin? Is it possible that He should move one who, in entering on his sacred office, will be assuming a position which must prove to himself full of grievous temptation, of great spiritual peril—a position in which he is sure to become a stumbling-block in the way of others? This cannot be; and hence we may infer what is one safe ground on which to build this trust—we may trust that God's Holy Spirit is moving us, if He has long been teaching us to fear to grieve Him.

Be assured that it is on something definite, something distinct, in our past history, that this trust is to be grounded; not on any mere persuasion of the *necessity* of Divine guidance; not on any resolves, adopted at the moment, respecting the course of our future life. A man may say, "I am not in holy orders now; men do not expect of me now the conduct which becomes a clergyman; my daily engagements do not now remind me, as they will hereafter, of my highest duties; I shall be an altered man when I am once at my work." Rely not on any such reasonings or expectations as these. If a man is to feel his responsibility after ordination, he must, ordinarily, have felt it strongly before; nor is it probable that the discharge of sacred duties will work any beneficial change upon the disposition and conduct of one who

has consented to pass, without watchfulness over his conduct and a steady resistance to temptation, the solemn period of preparation for the ministry of the Christian Church. Think of the day when you must profess that you trust that you are moved by the Holy Ghost to take on you that sacred office, and let it be your earnest effort that this trust may be based on nothing less than the remembrance of a heart "kept with all diligence"—of pure and guarded conduct—of a constant solicitude lest you should grieve in thought, or word, or deed, that Holy Spirit by whose sacred counsels you are hoping to be so mercifully guided.

But, is there nothing more which is required in order that we may safely and wisely avow the trust of which our service speaks? Is it not the duty of *all* Christians not to grieve the Holy Spirit of God? And would, therefore, the patient endeavour to avoid this sin constitute a sufficient ground for trusting that we are moved to take upon us a special office in God's Church? - Surely there is something more than this; God's Holy Spirit moves *all* who obey His voice to forsake sin and to follow after holiness; but will not those peculiar motions, by which He calls to the office of the ministry, be characterized by results peculiar to themselves? We cannot doubt it. If a man is to be happy and useful in the cure of souls, he must be more weaned from the world than other Christians ordinarily need to be; he must have learned, in a degree which is not necessary for others, not to be

entangled in the concerns of this life; he must understand, in a profounder sense than others, the ἀποτάσσεται of the Evangelist.* And, by the world, I mean not the *evil* of the world in its stricter sense, but what are regarded as its harmless occupations and pleasures. This may seem a hard saying to those who have not made proof of parochial duties—those who have made proof of them know that it is a true saying. If God's Spirit move us to feed the flock of God, will not His motions work within us desires and purposes akin to those which were felt and expressed by our blessed Lord, when He said, "I have meat to eat that ye know not of," "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish His work?"† God's Spirit, if He move us to take upon us the office of the ministry, will dispose us to give up every thing which hinders the discharge of its duties, to value nothing—to desire nothing—in comparison of the performance of our great work. Let me not however be mistaken here. It is not an ascetic spirit which we are to cultivate—a spirit which hates and scorns the world, and lets in no love to supply the place of the love of the world which is cast out. We shall cherish, under the guidance of God's Holy Spirit, another mind than this—a love of God, of Christ, and of His Church—which will leave no room for any baser love—which will teach us to *forget* the world, its pleasures and its follies, in the pursuit of far nobler objects.

* St. Luke, xiv. 33.

† St. John, iv. 32, 34.

An acquaintance with the details of parochial duty will readily convince us how necessary this voluntary disengagement from the world is to the discharge of our sacred functions. "For their sakes," said our Lord, "I sanctify myself;"* and we, after our measure, must sanctify ourselves, for the sake of those whom we serve. Where is the Christian Minister to render his best service—to seek his noblest reward? Where, but in the chamber of the sick and dying? And what manner of person ought he to be, in order that he may there be regarded with due confidence—in order that he may himself there feel a due confidence in his own sacred commission? The dying man will not readily open his heart to us except he knows our life and conversation to be answerable to our holy calling; and our lips too will be sealed, if we are conscious that our habitual conduct belies the awful truths which it is our duty to declare. We may go through the routine of visitation; we may exhort—we may examine—we may pray; but the Christian wisdom, and charity, and earnestness, which are oftentimes so deeply needed, can dwell only in a watchful and prepared heart—in a heart sobered and calmed by retirement and simplicity of life, and strengthened and purified by prayer. Experience alone, perhaps, can fully teach us the importance of careful and habitual preparation for duties such as these, yet thoughtful reflection may enable us at least

* St. John, xvii. 19.

in some degree to anticipate its lessons ; and we shall therefore do well to ask ourselves whether, for the sake of serving God effectively in scenes like these, we are willing to forego all which may mark us as men of the world in the eyes of others, or leave the condemning consciousness of worldliness to harass and enfeeble our own minds. If we are steadily resolved to make this sacrifice—and to make it for this end, if we are disciplining ourselves, by present self-denial of this kind, for the duties of our future calling, we shall herein find another ground for trusting that God's Holy Spirit is moving us to take on us the office of the ministry.

But, again, we must remember that small faults and foibles will greatly interfere with our usefulness as Christian ministers. Many, who may feel no personal hostility towards us, will be only too glad to find something in our conduct to weigh against our unwelcome exhortations. Indolence—or levity of conduct—any weakness or inconsistency on our part may serve to relieve them from the wholesome compunction occasioned by our public teaching—may enable them to comfort themselves with the thought that we are not altogether so strict, so earnest, so sincere as we seemed to be, when we spoke of the necessity of self-denial, of taking up our cross and following Christ, of using all diligence to make our calling and election sure. “The children of this world,” said our Lord, “are in their generation wiser than the children of

light ;"* we must strive, as Christian ministers, to make ourselves exceptions to this rule; we must not permit the busy man of the world to slight us for our indolence or sloth, nor the grave and thoughtful man of the world to despise us for our frivolity. The Apostle's rule of being made "all things to all men,"† finds its full application here; we must cultivate those virtues and good habits which will recommend us, and religion for our sakes, to those who love it not; we must renounce those frailties and self-indulgences which hinder our instructions, and enable men, through our fault, to misconstrue or disbelieve the truth. Let us bear in mind the wide charity of the Apostle in this respect, and strive to imitate it. Where nothing more sacred—more valuable—than our own ease or enjoyment is concerned, let us not hesitate to adopt his noble rule, "It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor anything whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak."‡

And surely we may be moved to make these sacrifices, if sacrifices they are to be called, by considering how unhappy and dishonorable must be the life of any clergyman whose heart is not in the duties of his sacred office. What but a good conscience, and the hope of God's approval, and the anticipation of a future reward, is to support a man under the privations, and toils, and disappointments so frequently

* St. Luke, xvi. 8.

† 1 Cor. ix. 22.

‡ Romans, xiv. 21.

attendant on the ministry of Christ's Church? If we would be happy, we must seek our happiness in our duties alone—in the endeavour to discharge them from the purest motives and with the greatest zeal. We shall know at times what it is to be tempted to think of our calling in a sordid and faithless manner—to think that we are labouring but in vain—striving without success—leading a profitless and wearisome life; we shall know at times what it is to look with a wistful or jealous eye on honours or emoluments which recompense, in other pursuits, efforts not more self-denying or strenuous than our own; and it will be sad indeed for us if we have not, to support us at these times, a deeply rooted conviction of our true honour and happiness as ministers of Christ—a conviction on which we can fall back when these dark shadows overwhelm us—a conviction which may enable us to “hold fast that which is good” in the midst of dejection and disquietude. “If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable,”* said the Apostle in days of persecution; and, except we set before us the same hope which he did, and for that hope forego with cheerfulness the hopes of earth, we shall undoubtedly seem to ourselves of all men the least fortunate, in respect of the profession which we have chosen and the advantages which we are deriving from it.

I have thus given a brief and very imperfect

* 1 Cor. xv. 19.

outline of the preparation of heart required as a sure ground of the *trust* which we are called on to avow in the Ordination Service. Happy are they in whose case this ground is firmly laid—happy, in proportion as the work has been prosecuted for a longer time, and with greater watchfulness and diligence; for the more steadfast will be the hope with which they can look forward to the duties of their high calling, the more lively will be their confidence of God's favour and blessing in the course which is awaiting them. But, whatever be the record of the past, let it be your resolve to improve the future—to “redeem the time”—not to allow what you may wisely regard as well-nigh the most solemn day of your lives to overtake you unawares—not to lose, through negligence or indifference, any portion of the blessing which shall surely rest on those, whose hearts shall not then condemn them, in avowing their trust that they are moved by the Holy Ghost to take on them the office of the Ministry.

“Them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed,” such is the warning which the Lord addressed, by His prophet, to His ministers of old; and surely the solemn form which the Church has now provided for the ordering of God's ministers can leave no other impression on your minds than this, that, in taking your part in it, you must be, in a most signal manner, either honouring God or despising Him—either

avowing your humble confidence that you have been visited with a special influence of God's Sacred Spirit, directing your wills and judgments to the choice of His immediate service—or presumptuously asserting a belief, which your hearts cannot honestly entertain, to which your lives are not answerable.

Be assured that God "will be sanctified in them that" thus "come nigh Him,"* and be it your earnest prayer and constant effort that He may be sanctified in you, both by your confession on that day, and by all your subsequent conduct as servants of the household of God.

* Leviticus x. 3.

ERRATUM.

Page 10, line 16—for "man," read *men*.

Henry Rowsell, Printer, King Street, Toronto.

